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Chapter XVIII

Are the Indians Grateful or Ungrateful?

154. A universal complaint. 155. Beggary. 156. Ingratitude through ignorance. 157. The legend of Makunaimá and of the Government. 158. There are no gifts among Indians. 159. Practical advice. 160. Pleasant memories.

154. One of the proverbs most widely spread against the Indians is the one which is contained like gall in its bladder in the thousand times repeated quatrain:

The Indian flees from work
And looks for idleness:
Where they beat him up, he stays,
Where they pay him, he goes away.

431 This matter of ingratitude is more than a common, uni-
577 versal complaint of all against all others. And the fact is that since "gratitude is an interminable debt," -- (for which reason it is very correctly said that money is worth more than favors), many make excessive use of their gifts, by always and endlessly asking for the loan of services. As a result of which there exists that other little verse:

"Give him always, don't give him one;
You haven't given him anything." /72/

which is a two-edged blade, which cuts equally ingrates and the excessively demanding.

155. Another very similar thing and one which many confuse with ingratitude is excessive asking for favors, from which doubtless missionaries and Indians suffer. However, I [123] myself, who a great many times have suffered the bother of this defect (?) of the Indians through not being able to remedy

/72 cont./

it with gifts, serenely ask: What other thing can and must we poor people do but beg? What should dry earth do but sit up and open its mouth in demand for water?

Nor will anyone deny that splendid and generous people are rare; and in the face of this undeniable fact of miserliness, there is no other remedy than to be beggarly. "A stubborn poor person extracts a crumb of bread." For this reason also the natives often endure punishment and maltreatment, which they did not go looking for (where they beat them they remain) and they go away when they have received their pay, because this is precisely what they came looking for and what they have been working for. And we would be presumptuous in the extreme if, because we pay the Indians, we should want to keep them indefinitely at our side and in our service.

156. Wisely did Father Eulogio warn that "the uncivilized Indian does not show gratitude in any way," and this is due to ignorance of our ways of life, our industries, and our business ways.

Another missionary, Father Baltasar de Matallana, also says that such Indians "believe that shotguns loaded with shot and powder rained down from heaven on us." Another humorist, an explorer of mines in all the Guianas, assured me that the natives imagined that we were born with money in our pockets, just as they were born with lice in their hair and fleas on their feet.

And that is why it turned out to be unproductive, when we brought Indians to Caracas, to take them to the shops and warehouses, since they couldn't understand why, out of so many pieces of cloth, so many ready-made clothes exposed to their avid glances, so many dozens of suitcases, axes, and other tools, not a single meter was ever cut off for them, that nobody ever gave them a garment, nor let them take away what, apparently, was more than enough for the others.

157. The old Indians also have the legendary belief that their ancient predecessors, the Makunaimá, extremely able,

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538 ingenious, and industrious, sent them in an airplane all good
829 things, but that we, the Venezuelans, don't give them to them and keep them for ourselves. And thus it can be seen quite clearly that, far from thanking us for what we do give them, it is we who should be thankful and obligated because they spare our lives. /Plate appears here./ /13/

797 Another reason why the Indians sometimes are not grateful,
829 as they should be, for gifts and personal sacrifices by the missionaries, is the propaganda, already widespread, already begun by the Creoles established among them. These latter frequently try to deceive them, saying to them, for example, that the Government is sending them many things, but that we are appropriating them for ourselves.

But the truth of the case is precisely the opposite; that is, that the governmental allotments do not even cover the personal expenses of the missionaries, much less provide for making gifts to the poor Indians. In any case, they are ignorant of this; and thus, because of the ignorance of some and the envy of others, this legend of the magnificent and generous government is a twin sister of the aforesaid one of the Makunaimá; and the final result is the repellent ingratitude, only attenuated by the lack of knowledge at the bottom of things. But, however, if Creoles who know how to read and writers who know how to write, who can get their information from the Gaceta Oficial /Official Gazette/ and the annual Memoir of the Ministry of Interior Relations of the laughable quantities allotted for the missions, are ignorant or pretend to be ignorant of these things and therefore want to deny our personal sacrifices and our work for our country, is it strange that the Indians are ignorant of the truth and without blame?

● 431 158. It can well be said that gifts among the Indians do
437 not exist; everything among them is purchase-sale or lending. "If you give to those who give to you, what fun is there in it? Do the gentiles not perhaps do this?"

/73 cont./

431 123 437 Practice has taught us not to accept any gift from them or to try to pay them back immediately with another gift; since were we to do otherwise 50 years later they would ask us for a corresponding payment. And this does not only apply to gifts offered by the natives to civilized persons, but also to those that they make among themselves. As a result the most reflective and delicate Indians (and there are such), when they are guests, try to pay back their hosts by helping them in their usual chores, bringing some game or fish, carrying firewood or water, etc. This observation has been expressly made to me by them and shows the delicacy of some of them not to be obligated and in others the fear of being recriminated for favors received completely gratis.

159. With respect to the matter under consideration, we must reiterate as very practical advice in dealing with the natives the following:

1. Not to accept any gift without the appropriate paying back of it. /74/
2. The best way to be freed of their demands, when this is a nuisance to us and we don't have any way of quieting it, is for us to ask for anything they may have.
3. When we stay among them we must lend a hand with the common loads or the expenses of food, and thus we shall be free from their recriminations.

123 437 On a certain occasion some Indians of a certain place made me a gift of some pineapples, which I immediately had peeled and divided among them themselves. Hardly had they eaten when the splendid donor came to ask me for bread; the pineapples belonged to the women and they wanted some little combs, which I didn't have. Then I divided among them all a half pound of chocolate, the pieces of which were a very good equivalent for the rings of pineapple; and as the women also ate, I asked them in payment for a <u>wenek</u> for carrying children. As they had not received the little combs, they